

California Spotted Owl Conservation Objectives Report

Questions and Answers



1. What is the purpose of the California Spotted Owl Conservation Objectives Report?

The Service's California Spotted Owl Conservation Objectives Report was developed to inform ongoing and future conservation efforts, including collaborations with partners to conserve the species and its habitat. The goal of this report is to identify ecologically relevant goals to guide the development of regional conservation strategies and other conservation plans for CSO under different land uses.

2. What species does the report cover?

The report focuses on the California spotted owl. It also includes relevant information about spotted owls in general.

The California spotted owl (*Strix occidentalis occidentalis*) is one of three genetically distinct populations of spotted owls, which includes the threatened Northern spotted owl (*Strix occidentalis caurina*) and threatened Mexican spotted owl (*Strix occidentalis lucida*). Relative to the other two subspecies, the California spotted owl exhibits low genetic variation.

The spotted owl is a medium-sized brown owl with a mottled appearance, round face, large pale brown facial disks, dark brown eyes, and a yellowish green bill. California spotted owls are found on public forestlands and private timberlands throughout the Sierra Nevada, as well as southern forests in California. California spotted owls can live more than 15 years in the wild. While adult survival is high, they have a low reproduction rate; which makes them slow to recover from population declines. Ensuring that these raptors' habitat needs are addressed is vital to the conservation of the species. The California Spotted Owl Conservation Objectives Report is an important resource that will inform conservation efforts for the species and its habitat to ensure its survival.

3. Is the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service releasing conservation reports for Northern spotted owl and Mexican spotted owl?

No. Both the Northern spotted owl and Mexican spotted owl are federally listed species, and recovery plans have been developed for these species that outline specific actions that will assist in their recovery. The California spotted owl is not protected under the Endangered Species Act.

4. What are the conservation objectives for the California spotted owl?

The report includes general objectives and stressor-specific objectives. The objectives are:

General

1. Reduce population declines
2. Manage habitat for spotted owl use and the long-term establishment of natural fire regimes
3. Develop and encourage voluntary conservation actions
4. Create a region-wide monitoring program and develop adaptive management plans
5. Prioritize and support research to address additional uncertainties

Stressor-specific

1. Large, high-severity fires—Retain and restore resilient forests throughout the range of California spotted owls

2. Forest management practices—Use forest management tools that are compatible with maintaining essential habitat elements for California spotted owls
3. Tree mortality—Monitor the effects of tree mortality on California spotted owls
4. Barred owls—Establish and implement a monitoring and management study and/or plan for barred owls
5. Contaminants—Identify rodenticide exposure rates in California spotted owls
6. Climate—Align habitat planning and protection with areas likely to support high canopy cover and large trees under future climate scenarios

5. How was the California Spotted Owl Conservation Objectives Report developed?

This report was developed using the best available science, including information received related to the Service's March 17, 2017, letter soliciting information from a wide range of interested parties, primary literature, recent emerging scientific research, and expert elicitation. The report underwent external peer review in Summer 2017.

6. Where is the California spotted owl located?

California spotted owls are found on public forestlands and private timberlands throughout the western Sierra Nevada, as well as forests in Southern California.

Most of our knowledge about California spotted owl population trends is derived from four long-term demography studies in the Sierras, and one in southern California. These data indicate that since the early 1990s California spotted owls have declined on three national forests in the Sierras: Eldorado National Forest (50 percent); Lassen National Forest (44 percent); and Sierra National Forest (31 percent). In Southern California, San Bernardino National Forest has experienced a 65 percent decline in population. Currently, the only stable population on public lands appears to be in Sequoia-Kings Canyon National Park. Other areas have not been systematically monitored.

7. What is causing the declines in California spotted owl populations?

Although the causes of California spotted owl population declines have not been conclusively identified, recent research suggests that past habitat loss due to removal of large trees and fire suppression may have partly contributed to the declines.

8. What stressors threaten the California spotted owl?

There are a variety of stressors that can put the species at risk, which include:

1. Large, high-severity fires
2. Forest management practices
 - a. Mechanical thinning
 - b. Salvage logging
 - c. Clearcutting
3. Tree mortality
4. Barred owls
5. Contaminants
6. Climate

9. How will private landowners be impacted by the California Spotted Owl Conservation Objectives Report?

The report is provided to help focus efforts of landowners in proactive conservation of this species, and encourages private landowners to coordinate with the Service in the development of conservation plans and strategies for California spotted owl. This report provides guidance only and is not a regulatory document. Identification of conservation objectives and measures does not create any new legal obligations.